

As A Group, Millennials Are Unlike Any Other Youth Generation In Living Memory

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As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older American no longer associates with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct.¹

Strauss and Howe define the Millennials as those individuals born between 1982 and 2002. As new generations develop and societal culture changes, so must the efforts of organizations wanting to recruit them, namely the U.S. Army. In order to recruit America's best and brightest, the Army must appeal to the youth, as well as those that influence America's youth. The Army must refocus its recruiting efforts to zero in on what motivates America's young people and create goodwill with the people that influence those youths to effectively attract the Millennials.

Conducting any type of information operations, to include recruiting, requires an understanding of the target culture. At the start, decision makers must separate distinct generational characteristics from current societal stereotypes. Many significant, life-changing events have occurred in the Millennial's lifetime (1982-2002) that either shaped them as individuals or shaped other generation's perceptions of them to include: the crash of PANAM flight 103, the Oklahoma City Bombing, the basement bombing of the World Trade Center, the Embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, the shootings at Columbine High School, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and, surprisingly important to the Millennials, the Monica Lewinsky/Bill Clinton scandal. A look at some actual characteristics of Generation Y, followed by some common misconceptions of

¹ <http://www.cnr.uidaho.edu/winr/howe24.3.htm>, *Millennials Rising*, by Neil Howe and William Strauss, Vintage Books, Random House, New York. 2000. Softbound.

them, will aid in the understanding of how the Army can refocus some of their recruiting efforts.

One of the most common misconceptions about this generation lies in its activity level. The explosion of the video game market, computers in almost every household, and the rise in overweight youth provides the fuel for the fire for other generations to consider the Millennials lazy. In fact, studies show that Millennials have cut TV viewing times in order to read books and that there is no difference between the Millennials and Generation X with regard to time spent in front of video games and computers.² Contrary to popular belief regarding what many refer to as the “Nintendo Generation,” Generation Y is, in fact, a very active group. A parental desire to actively engage with their children, as well as an increase in societal violence causes many Baby Boomer parents to become abundantly involved in their child’s lives. Moreover, many parents opt for organized, supervised, after-school activities to prevent children from roaming the streets. This increase in activity not only promotes a busier youth, but also contributes to this generation being one of the youngest severely stressed generations in history.³

Generation Y is often regarded as a ‘babied’ generation that does not work. The common belief is that the money they spend is given to them and they do not possess an appreciation for the value of the dollar. The reality is that not only does this generation work, but it is also very focused on the future. Many

² Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak. *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in your Workplace* (New York, NY: AMACOM, 200).

³ Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak, *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in your Workplace* (New York, NY: AMACOM, 200), 133

have five year plans and plan on being more financially successful than their parents. One-third of this generation works more than 20 hours a week and has an estimated average spending capacity of 94 dollars a week. Twenty percent of teenagers own stock and incredibly, in “2002, teens (12-19) spent 170 billion dollars.”⁴

The perception many have of this generation is that it lacks respect for others, and questions authority by constantly asking ‘why?’ Howe and Strauss indicate that the Millennials are being raised in a culture that yearns for the manners of the Veteran Generation.⁵ As a result, parents are insisting that children say “yes ma’am” and “no ma’am”, and “yes sir” and “no sir”, creating a generation more respectful than the previous three. Additionally, Millennials are, according to Howe and Strauss, looking for a strong foundation of guidance. The same planned activities that lead to a stressful youth result in a very structured young life for this generation. When this structure is absent, these youths seek guidance by asking the proverbial ‘Why?’

The computer age has made this generation much more impatient than other generations at this age. This can be a double-edged sword, in that these potential soldiers will be eager to excel and learn in the workplace, while simultaneously, their impatience will rear its ugly head when they are: in a hurry to get promoted, looking for the next task before finishing the current one, and asking those incessant questions that often aggravate other generations.

⁴ www.neric.org/Keynote.ppt, 20 April 2005, slide 24

⁵ Howe and Strauss

In the past, the Army relied heavily upon benefits as a motivator for recruitment. This was very successful, especially for Generation X, since this was the first generation who did not think it would fair as well financially as their parents.⁶ In these times of extremely youthful entrepreneurs, such things as college tuition are not enough to bring Millennials to the recruiters. In fact, benefits are one of the last reasons for young men and women to enlist today.⁷ A sense of civic duty and the ability to work as a member of a team towards a common goal that benefits the “greater good” appeals to this generation. The Army’s recent change to the slogan “An Army of One” has had a positive impact on today’s youth because it presents the idea that every single soldier has the ability to make a difference in the organization while working as a team member. Individual efforts are just as important as group efforts, and this is specifically the type of work environment the Millennials flourish in.

Although this new slogan revamped the Army’s image and perked up the ears of today’s youth, a catch-phrase alone is not enough to continue the upward trend in recruiting. Although the slogan “Army of One” appeals to the Millennials sense of contribution, it fails to appeal to the team/family orientation and community consciousness that this generation possesses. In 2002-2003, the Army ran a series of commercials that focused on not only individual strength, but the relationship between that individual strength and the strength of the Army team as a whole. This approach must be revisited to show this Generation not

⁶ Zemke, Ron. “Here come the Millennials.” *Training*, July 200, 63-64.

⁷ United States Army Recruiting Command, *FY2003 New Recruit Study* (Fort Monroe, VA: USAAC) 13 May 2004.

only the importance of individual contribution, but also how the Army needs cohesive teams.

A team mentality focus will aid recruiting efforts in several ways. Currently, that focus is targeting the prospective soldier and his contributions to the Army team. That focus needs to be shifted to show more of how not just the prospective soldier fits into the overall big picture, but how his mission, family, and community do as well. With generation after generation continuing to define themselves more as members of a family who happen to be soldiers as opposed to soldiers with families, it is vital to show the youth how that piece fits into the puzzle. It will require only small changes in the current advertising mentality to include a 'zoomed out' image that fills in this gap.

The current message is solely focused on the individual, which appeals to Generation Y; however, potentially even more appealing to the Millennials is how that individual contribution aids in the overall accomplishment of the mission. An ideal message would be one that shows: the individual soldier accomplishing his assigned task, that soldier's squad/platoon accomplishing a more important task related to the individual, and so on until a very visible and important objective is accomplished by this 'team-oriented' organization.

The team mentality focus can be harnessed once again to show how these contributions aid local communities. Often it is difficult to draw a direct cause and effect relationship between soldier actions and community well being, but the message can still be relayed. Using the NFL's advertising technique as an example, the Army can show the innumerable ways that it is beneficial to

communities, whether by individual contributions, unit community service activities or base sponsored events. In the same way commercials show how America was united after the 9/11 attacks, so can the Army take advantage of the current societal support of the military to show youth that being a soldier is a revered occupation. The potential for building an enormous amount of goodwill with not only these prospective soldiers, but also the individuals who influence them, is only lacking a voice to draw attention to it. Goodwill is a very valuable commodity. In fact, certain companies are able to claim this as an asset and attribute millions of dollars to it.

Generation Y is often characterized as confident, optimistic, diverse, team and family oriented, and community conscious. By refocusing the Army's recruiting efforts in the manners described, it can now appeal to the most important qualities Millennials look for when choosing a career. Potentially, this change will result in several positive 2nd and 3rd order effects: 1) this approach will appeal more to potential soldiers looking to be a part of something greater than themselves (not just an Army of One) and not looking solely for personal benefit, 2) the advertising will aid in giving the Army more of an identity by attaching teamwork, strong family, and community service as characteristics that define a soldier 3) finally, the goodwill built now will not only begin to pay off immediately, but as youth looks to parents, teachers, and coaches for guidance in their life decisions, the Army can continue to enjoy the dividends from its' long established goodwill.

More attention must be paid to those who influence, or mentor, the youth of America. Just as companies can assign a monetary value to goodwill, the Army must recognize the importance of positively influencing mentors in order to reach the youth of America. These mentors are a very diverse group and can range from parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, older siblings to coaches, pastors, teachers, boy scouts leaders, and counselors. The take-away is that the Army can no longer afford to see its target audience solely as those individuals aged 18 to 25 years old. Instead, a concentration on building a solid relationship with these mentors who influence the current target audience will go a lot further in developing the goodwill required to energize recruiting.

Army Recruiting Command has actually begun taking steps in the right direction by funding a NASCAR driver.

According to a brand study conducted for NASCAR by market research firm Ipsos-Reid, NASCAR has 75 million fans, 42% of whom earn at least \$50,000. Some 40% of the fans are women and nearly 60% are between ages 18 and 44.⁸

This new effort is an attempt to reach not only the potential soldier but their mentors as well. This fledgling idea is a great start, but is not the best the Army can do.

Creating goodwill between individuals within and society and the “big Army” begins by addressing not only the career soldier’s need, but the needs of those who decide to enlist for a short period of time, do their duty, and transition to another vocation. Although there are programs in the Army that aid in the transition from soldier to civilian, they fall short of expectations. Focus of the

⁸ <http://www.tristate.edu/faculty/herbig/mkt323secrets.htm>, 23 April 2005

command must remain on the preparing soldiers for their next mission, but many leaders fail to understand that this includes preparing soldiers for their next career, where applicable. Instead of respecting and appreciating every person's service, regardless of the term, leaders tend to concentrate solely on those soldiers who wish to re-enlist and stay in the service. This lack of soldier care is seen by many as a slight, and leaves many departing soldiers with a poor Army image that stays with them in their next endeavors, and jades their interaction with those interested in military service.

A command focus on taking care of these soldiers, realizing that they will be spokesmen and women when they leave, can change the departing soldiers attitude to one of benevolence. This can be accomplished with little extra in the way of man-hours or loss of focus on mission accomplishment, and often at the company commander level. Instituting something as simple as an hour-long outbrief with the departing soldier will allow them to vent, suggest improvements, reinforce what is working and give indicators for what failed. Additionally, positive reinforcement for the soldier's service can provide the departing soldier with a true sense of accomplishment, and leave him or her feeling as if they were able to make a difference. Recognition at the company level, whether through an award, a company token, or a sincere handshake are simple reminders that everyone's service, no matter how long, is appreciated and important. This not only displays a genuine interest in the soldier; but also creates a feeling of ownership in the departing soldier that will aid in creating the goodwill the Army needs.

The Army also has another potentially very effective initiative with community outreach programs, but so far is only conducting them on a very limited scale. In and around DC there are several programs focused on bringing the Army's message to the public. The failing of these programs is not intent or execution but rather reach. Spirit of America and Twilight Tattoo reach well over a 100,000 citizens year. The target audience is primarily school age children on field trips.⁹ This offers only a very limited window of opportunity to reach these potential recruits and mentors.

In contrast, an outreach program more focused on relating the Army message in major cities across the nation would allow that message to reach a much more diverse group of people. Initial speculation of an operation this size, might indicate a very expensive logistical heavy budget.¹⁰ However, with the widespread location of Army bases, the ability to suspend execution during times of conflict, and expenses spread over Accessions Command, supporting bases, and the lead Command (Military District of Washington), the operation becomes much more manageable.¹¹

Culture, people, and priorities are ever-changing. Organizations must adapt to stay relevant. This concept is never more important than when talking about recruiting for the Armed Forces. The ability for the Army to accomplish its' mission is directly related to its ability to recruit America's best and brightest. In

⁹ CPT Harvey was assigned to Ceremonies and Special Events, the organization responsible for both of these community outreach programs.

¹⁰ Spirit of America requires approximately 300 hundred soldiers and technicians; Twilight Tattoo approx 150.

¹¹ Accessions Command is the senior Command to Recruiting Command and is also responsible for the recruitment of ROTC, OCS, etc.

order to reach Generation Y and future generations, we must understand that generation as well as be able to create and harness the goodwill of those individuals that influence these generations.

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